

A

# REVIEW

## OF THE

# STATE

## OF THE

# BRITISH NATION.

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Saturday, April 26. 1707.

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**I**N examining the Original and Occasion of Dissenting in *England*, from the present establish'd Church, I have all along endeavour'd to show, how and by what Methods we have been thus unhappily divided; and from hence I draw the following Arguments, which will in themselves discover the true Reason of my entering upon this Matter, which at first View some People may think useless or out of Season.

*First*. I infer, that the *Dissenters* do not of meer Choice differ or dissent from the Church, for the Sake of Dissenting, as some maliciously have offer'd, or for Trifles or indifferent Things as others alledge; but of plain Necessity, from true Principles of Conscience, Sense of Duty, and Scruples which they cannot get over.

*Secondly*. That upon the Church of *Eng-*

*land* refusing to grant or abate, what they cannot comply with, they do not nevertheless reject her as a Church, count her Heretical or Antichristian, but own her as a true Church, subscribe willingly all her Doctrinal Articles, and treat her Members as Brethren, with whom, tho' they have some Difference, they can yet agree in Principles, and preserve for her both their Charity and Respect.

*Thirdly*. That, would the Church of *England* enter upon a farther Reformation, and abate in their Discipline, Government and Worship, what these think is not warranted by the Word of GOD, they would most gladly joyn with them again, and become one united Body of Christians, in Love, Charity, Doctrine, Worship and Government.

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In laying down these things, are, I think, necessarily clear'd up those Doubts, which some People have lately rais'd; that the *Dissenters* are therefore Episcopally inclin'd, and from thence have discover'd a farther fatal and unhappy Consequence, *Viz.* A Division between them and the Church of *Scotland*, as if the *Dissenters* in *England* were dangerous to the Settlement and Security of the Church of *Scotland*, and to be distrust-ed on that Account.

The present Business of this Island, now happily united, is to have three vast Bodies built upon several and distinct Foundations, be secure in their respective Establishments, and if possible be divested of Power to oppress one another, by any means whatsoever.

Indeed I cannot help putting this into other Words, and saying, the Business is not to have them be *secure*, but to open their Eyes, and make them see *that they are secure*, and to bring them, if possible, to be satisfy'd with real Security, and not be ever frightening themselves, and amusing one another with chymical, remote and supposititious Possibilities of Dangers, which, like Armies and Fleets in the Air, if steadily view'd with Judgment and Time, always dissolve into meer Cloud, Vapour and Emptyness, in which they are form'd.

The Safety of the respective Ecclesiastical Settlements in *Britain* depends, not so much on the Securities stipulated on either side by the Treaty of Union, by which their Hands are tied from crushing one another, as from the voluntary Bonds of the Minds form'd in the Judgment, and freely consented to in their separate Capacities; and this is what I am labouring to bring to pass.

That a Conviction might be form'd in the Minds of the several Parties, how their mutual Safety depends upon the Negatives of each others Will, that there be no Desire in either Party to oppress or invade each other.

An Objection, I know, lies in the Way of this, which I shall endeavour to remove, *Viz.* I am a Church of *England* Man, or I am a Presbyterian, I cannot be just to my Profession, nor answer it to my Conscience, if I do not wish to have all the Nation con-

vinc'd of the same things, and profess the same Principles with my self, and which I think are best; and therefore it is impossible for me to bring my Will to a Consent, so that if it were in my Power, I would not bring all the Nation to be what I am, I could not be a Christian without it.

This Argument is, I think, faithfully stated, and speaking of religious Affairs only, I believe it will hold—— But we must take our Matter complexly, and we must consider in that these following things.

1. Is the Church or the People, I belong to, so or so circumstanc'd, as that the Assistance, Confederacy or Coalition with the People, I differ from, is necessary to their Support and Security; if so, then the Coalition or Confederacy with such a People becomes Part of my very Care for the Church or People, to which I belong as aforesaid: Nor is this doing Evil, that Good may come; for as the Confederacy or Coalition is not evil in it self, but may only be circumstantially evil, so as thus circumstanc'd, 'tis actually good, and is a direct preserving and upholding what I profess before: Thus if I am by the Covenant bound to support and defend with my Blood the Presbyterian Church Government in *Scotland*, is She beset with *Popish, Jacobite, French* and foreign Enemies, false, treacherous and fiery Friends, and is She in an ill Posture of Security at Home? Then, to strengthen her by the Confederacies of Enemies, and fortifie her with Alliances, Confederacies or Coalition, 'tis in this Case nothing but securing her present flourishing Condition, and consequently a pursuing the true End of the Covenant or Engagement mention'd before, engaging to the securing the Church.

If the Gentlemen, who think themselves engag'd against this Union on Account of religious Engagements, would consider this seriously, I persuade my self, they would cease to call this Union a Breach of their Oaths, a National Perjury, and the like.

As to wishing all People of our Mind, then it can be extended no farther, than to pray and endeavour by Instruction or Persuasion to enlighten the Minds of those, we think in an Error; and nothing of that is restrain'd by the Treaty of Union.



## MISCELLANEA.

IN my Discourse of the Poor, I came in course to speak of the poor Debtors, poor Bankrupts; *England* is a Nation famous for Laws, mercifully contriv'd, and tenderly executed, *and long may she preserve that Character*; but if she is in Hazard of losing it any way, it is by these particular Methods with Debtors.

If there be any Cruelty practis'd in *England*, 'tis here; Racks, Inquisitions, Tortures and Gallies, I must confess in my Opinion, seem inferiour to the Barbarities practis'd here upon the Unfortunate; nay, the *Boots* and *Thumbtins* of *Scotland*, the last noble Invention of a Peer of that Country yet living, and which Christianity has since abhor'd, are Fools to the unsufferable Torments inflicted upon Debtors in *England*.

I neither have felt, nor do I apprehend falling into the Hands of such human Devils, so I am not pleading my own Case; but if I were to enlarge upon the late terrible Executions in *Languedoc*, such as burning with Sulphur, breaking on the Wheel, and intermitting languishing Deaths practis'd upon the poor *Camisars*, and compare them with the throwing Men into languishing Prisons, without Friends or Money, Help or Assistance, without Air, and without Bread; where Men, that have liv'd well, and are industrious in their Designs, have the daily Terror of seeing their Children starv'd, their Wives go distracted, their Friends abandon them, and have all the severe Trials of passive Valour, that can be suppos'd practicable: I must confess, he must have dark Apprehensions of Eternity, that would not chose Death by Torture, rather than such a Case.

Yet this is the Case in *England*; and if I were to give a List of the poor distress'd Wretches, who have in a few Years, by-past, perish'd in jails in *England*, by meer Want of Necessaries; that have dy'd, and been lost only by the most inhuman Barbarity of inexorable Creditors; The Roll of Blood would be dismal to read over, and the Cry

of those poor Wretches will be loud somewhere, whose Murder cannot be excus'd, neither in the particular Persons, nor in the Nation in general; since Debt is not a Crime punishable with Death, either by the Laws of GOD or Man.

I confess, there is Danger also in giving Encouragement by too gentle Usage to Cheats, common projecting Bankrupts, and innumerable trading Frauds: But the Extremities of Jails, Starving and Death are not absolutely necessary to remedy that Mischief.

I find no Scripture Rule for punishing Debtors with Death; perpetual Imprisonment is nothing but Death, and that of the worst Sort, being a lingering Torture, and dying with all the intollerable Circumstances of Despair: How our Legislators have been prevail'd with to condemn Bankrupts to perpetual Imprisonment at the Discretion of the Creditor, I cannot imagine, nor shall I examine that Case here——I cannot be prevail'd upon to believe, but some *Medium* might be found out to save the indigent, poor, desperate Debtor, and yet be severe upon the wilful, contriving, cheating and fraudulent Wretch, that visibly makes it his Design to abuse and betray his Creditor, that draws him in, lurches and deceives him.

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